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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine the relationships between parental styles and the components of self-esteem that correspond to Damon and Hart's conceptualization of the self. Specifically, high levels of both parental control and parent acceptance were hypothesized to be positively related to self-esteem. Undergraduate students (N=225) rated their parents' parental styles, appraised components of their own self-esteem, and assessed their adjustment. Subjects completed a demographic questionnaire, the Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory for both parents, the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, and the Langner Symptom Survey. Two multiple analyses of variance, one for mothers and one for fathers, were performed relating parental styles, components of self-esteem, and adjustment. No significant relationships were found for fathers. Mothers' Control was negatively related to physical and personal self-esteem and to adjustment, and when mothers had high Firm Control, mothers' Acceptance was positively related to social, behavior, and general self-esteem and to adjustment. The findings pertaining to the different components of self-esteem are consistent with Damon and Hart's developmental sequence of the self. (Author/NB)

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Parenting Styles as They Relate to Self-Esteem and Adjustment

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between parental styles and the components of self-esteem that correspond to Damon and Hart's conceptualization of the self. Specifically, high levels of both parental control and parental acceptance were hypothesized to be positively related to self-esteem. Two hundred and twenty-five undergraduates rated their parents' parental styles, appraised components of their own self-esteem, and assessed their adjustment. Two MANOVAs, one for mothers and one for fathers, were performed relating parental styles, components of self-esteem, and adjustment. No significant relationships were found for fathers. Mothers' Control was negatively related to physical and personal self-esteem, and to adjustment, and when mothers had high Firm Control, mothers' Acceptance was positively related to social, behavior and general self-esteem, and to adjustment. Implications for two types of parental control are discussed.

Parents are usually the most influential people in a person's life. Typically, parents are present and possibly even responsible for much of an individual's development as a person (Damon & Hart, 1982). What people are when they leave their parents will probably determine to a great extent their future adjustment (Bernard & Huckins, 1978). Therefore, it is important to look at the parents' role in the development of their children (Baumrind, 1971; Becker, 1964; Coopersmith, 1967; Harter, 1983). One characteristic of people that seems to play a significant role in their adjustment as an adult is their self-esteem (Bernard & Huckins, 1978). When individuals enter adulthood, a fairly stable, more differentiated self-esteem has been established (Damon & Hart, 1982). How individuals feel about themselves has its roots in how others feel about them and the positive and negative aspects of their interactions. Moreover, the way individuals feel about themselves influences how well adjusted they will be (Bernard & Huckins, 1978). Since parents are the most prominent "others" when self-esteem is developed, it is important to examine how specific attitudes and behaviors of parents influence individuals' self-esteem as an adult (Baumrind, 1971; Becker, 1964; Coopersmith, 1967; Harter, 1983). The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between dimensions of parental styles and a number of differentiated components of self-esteem in a college-aged population. A further aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between parental styles and adjustment.

Previous research has demonstrated that parental styles can be described along the dimensions of control and warmth (Baumrind, 1971; Becker, 1964; Coopersmith,

1967; Harter, 1983). These dimensions were assessed by examining how the subjects perceived their parent's styles based on a questionnaire, the Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory (CRPBI) which was developed by Schludermann and Schludermann (1988). This instrument contains a number of subscales that measure one of three parental style dimensions: psychological autonomy versus psychological control, which is essentially the control dimension; acceptance versus rejection, which is essentially the warmth dimension; and a third dimension firm control versus lax control.

Self-esteem was described by Coopersmith (1967) as "a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds towards himself" (p.5). Damon and Hart (1982) distinguish among different components of the self and provide a developmental sequence for self-understanding. Part of self-understanding is the self's judgement of worthiness regarding each component of the self as well as the self in general. The dimensions of self-esteem investigated in this study are those that relate to the dimensions of self-understanding that were proposed by Damon and Hart (1982). The subjects' self-esteems were assessed with the Tennessee Self Concept Scale (Roid & Fitts, 1988), a self-report measure of self-concept. For purposes of this study, self-concept as measured by the Tennessee Self Concept Scale is equated with self-esteem because the items assess the subjects' evaluations of aspects of their self. This measure provides subscale scores for different components of self-esteem, including the four which are of primary interest to this study: behavior, physical, social, and psychological self-esteem. These components are defined in Table 1. Furthermore, the measure includes a score for global self-esteem.

With regard to adjustment, Crow and Graham (1973) noted that individuals who are well adjusted have "wholesome and constructive attitudes and behavior" (p.200). An important determinant of good adjustment as adults is the development of self-esteem. The psychological adjustment of the subjects was assessed by the Langner Symptom Survey (Langner, 1962). This measure is a screening instrument for poor adjustment.

The hypothesis generated for this study was that college-aged individuals who have been exposed to specific types of parental styles will develop differently in the four aspects of self-esteem already mentioned. Furthermore, these individuals will develop differently in terms of general self-esteem and adjustment. Specifically, high levels of both control and acceptance were hypothesized to be positively related to self-esteem, especially social, psychological and general self-esteem, and also to adjustment.

Two hundred and twenty-five undergraduates were recruited from classes at a Midwestern university to participate in this study. Subjects completed a demographic questionnaire, the Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory for both parents, the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, and the Langner Symptom Survey.

The data derived from the completed questionnaires was then analyzed by means of two MANOVAs, one for mother and one for father. The parental styles obtained from the scores of the CRPBI served as the independent variables. The self-esteem component scores and the general self-esteem score from the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, as well as the adjustment score from the Langner Symptom Survey were used as the dependent variables.

Results found no significant relationships for fathers. Table 2 shows that mothers'

Control was negatively related to physical and personal self-esteem, and to adjustment. Table 3 shows that when mothers had high Firm Control, mothers' Acceptance was positively related to social, behavior and general self esteem, and to adjustment.

Results from the present study indicate that there are two different types of control. The Control dimension of the CRPBI resembles the control used by "authoritarian" parents who use control for their own sake (Baumrind, 1971). The Firm Control dimension represents consistent control. The results reveal that high levels of maternal authoritarian control may have damaging effects on individuals' physical and personal self-esteem, and on their adjustment. Furthermore, when firm and consistent maternal control is present with high levels of maternal acceptance and warmth, the development of social, behavior and general self-esteem is enhanced, as well as the development of good adjustment. The results pertaining to the different components of self-esteem are consistent with Damon and Hart's developmental sequence of the self.

According to Damon and Hart (1982), the development of behavior self-esteem, and social self-esteem is predicated upon the presence and input of others. If children feel accepted and are at the same time developing a sense of right and wrong, and a sense of responsibility during middle and late childhood because of their mother, there is little reason to believe that these children will not carry this foundation into the future and develop more mature behavior and social selves. Mothers who set firm, consistent limits for their children are giving their children social and behavioral guidelines and helping their children to establish a sense of responsibility. Moreover, mothers who also convey acceptance for their children will help them to accept their active and social

selves.

Damon and Hart (1982) describe the development of the psychological self or personal self-esteem as a gradual acquisition of competencies ranging from establishing one's preferences to establishing one's own personal philosophy. Coopersmith (1967) noted that a certain amount of self-initiative and control is essential for the development of a truly distinct identity that is acceptable. Mothers who for their own reasons control their children impede any attempt by their children to initiate the development of their own competencies (Baumrind, 1971). This lack of control on the child's part is likely to ultimately lead to low personal self-esteem.

According to Damon and Hart (1982), this same sense of control over oneself is vital for the full realization of the physical self. They describe the period of late adolescence as being the crucial stage for this. At this point individuals begin thinking at a more abstract level and with regard to their physical selves. They view their physical attributes as "reflecting volitional choices or personal and moral standards" (p. 860). However, even before late adolescence, individuals may never form a sense of autonomy or ownership of themselves because their controlling mothers do not allow them to become independent.

With regard to adjustment, Bernard and Huckins (1978) have implicated self-esteem as a prime determiner of whether someone will become adjusted or maladjusted. They maintain that people who have high self-esteem are more confident in themselves and their ability to adapt to novel situations. Therefore, they are more likely to remain adjusted. The correlations between the different components of self-esteem and

adjustment shown in Table 4 back up this claim. Therefore, the associations found between adjustment and parental styles are rather easily explained in light of the previously discussed self-esteem and parental style associations.

Table 1. Definitions of Components of Self-Esteem.

Physical Self-Esteem: Evaluation of one's own bodily properties material possessions (Damon and Hart's (1982) "physical self").

Behavior Self-Esteem: Evaluation of one's own bodily capabilities (Damon and Hart's "active self").

Social Self-Esteem: Evaluation of one's own social skills (Damon and Hart's "social self").

Personal Self-Esteem: Evaluation of one's own personal philosophy (Damon and Hart's "psychological self").

Table 2. F-statistics and Means of Maternal Control Analyses of Variance.

	Maternal Control			
Variable	High Means(SD)	Low Means(SD)	$F(1,54)$	eta^2
SSE	63.4(9.3)	69.1(6.0)	.96	.02
BSE	107.3(12.6)	115.9(8.4)	2.34	.04
PSE	60.1(9.0)	65.6(7.6)	4.91*	.08
PESE	66.5(8.8)	59.1(6.5)	9.13**	.14
GSE	344.5(33.5)	374.2(24.0)	1.62	.03
ADJ	7.5(4.3)	3.6(2.5)	14.81**	.21

N = 62 for all analyses.

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

Note. SSE = Social Self-Esteem; BSE = Behavioral Self-Esteem; PSE = Physical Self-Esteem; PESE = Personal Self-Esteem; GSE = General Self-Esteem; ADJ = Adjustment

Table 3. F-statistics and Means of Maternal Acceptance Within High Maternal Firm Control.

	Maternal Acceptance			
Variable	High Means(SD)	Low Means(SD)	$F(1,54)$	eta^2
SSE	68.5(6.0)	62.4(9.0)	6.73*	.11
BSE	115.4(7.7)	106.3(12.3)	6.51*	.11
PSE	63.9(5.7)	60.4(8.4)	3.78	.03
PESE	63.3(7.4)	59.3(8.4)	3.78	.07
GSE	371.6(20.9)	338.2(32.1)	14.43**	.22
ADJ	4.2(1.5)	7.0(4.3)	5.86*	.10

N = 62 for all analyses.

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

Table 4. Correlations Between Self-Esteem Ratings and Maladjustment Symptoms.

Variable	Adjustment
Social Self-Esteem	-.42*
Behavior Self-Esteem	-.53*
Physical Self-Esteem	-.58*
Personal Self-Esteem	-.64*
General Self-Esteem	-.58*

*$p < .01$

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